

Statement on Dan Kiley's Significance to Milwaukeeans

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Daniel Urban Kiley was born in Massachusetts in 1912. In 1932, he began a four-year apprenticeship with Warren Manning, the planting designer and landscape architect who worked with Frederick Law Olmsted and who oversaw the development of Milwaukee's Olmsted-designed parks (River, now Riverside; West, now Washington; and Lake) and was a founder of the American Society of Landscape Architects and helped create America's **National Parks**.

Kiley entered Harvard's landscape architecture program in 1936, which he left in 1938. He worked at both the National Park Service and the U.S. Public Housing Authority where he met architect Louis Kahn, who also introduced Kiley to Eero Saarinen (architect of Milwaukee's War Memorial Building among many other celebrated works). We have a letter of support for this designation from one of Kahn's former colleagues.

Kiley served in the Army between 1943 and 1945. He was named as Presentations Branch Director of the Office of Strategic Services, being nominated for the position by Eero Saarinen, who was stepping down. Kiley and Saarinen had a strong working relationship and would later collaborate on iconic American projects such as the Miller House and Garden (Columbus, IN), the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial ("Gateway Arch" in St. Louis, MO) and Dulles Airport (Washington, D.C.).

While at this position, Kiley was tasked with laying out the courtroom for the Nuremberg Trials in which the Allied Forces brought Nazi war criminals to trial. Kiley was given this very important and heavy task due to his strong design skills and excellent ability to create space. After this assignment he was able to travel. The sites he saw left a great impression on him and largely shaped his approach to landscape design from then on.

Kiley later wrote of that time: "[T]he opportunity to travel around Western Europe and, for the first time in my life, to experience formal, spatial built landscapes (as championed in France by André Le Nôtre at its grandest, most rarefied level, yet found on every street of tiny towns and cities).

THIS was what I had been searching for – a language ... to reveal nature's power and create spaces of structural integrity. I suddenly saw that lines, allées and orchards/bosque of trees, and clipped hedges, canals, pools and fountains could be tools to build landscapes of clarity and infinity, just like a walk in the woods."

What I saw in the fields and forests, town plazas and streets, was a language of form used to conduct the daily movement of life...In these orders and organizations of planting {} were landscapes of sustenance and ego. What opened my eyes and changed my approach to the act of design was the spatial and compositional power of the simplest of elements'...he goes on to say 'I wondered – I may have shouted – Why didn't anyone ever tell me?'

(from *Dan Kiley: The Complete Works of America's Master Landscape Architect*)

Dan Kiley had a great architectonic sense. His ability to respond to architecture was one of his strongest attributes, and he was a common collaborator of many great Modernist architects.

In terms of the rise of Modernism, we see evidence of that in the actual physical makeup of Kiley's spaces. The Modernist agenda calls for good design available to all (egalitarianism) and honesty and simplicity in the use of materials. These important markers of Modernism are explicitly evident in the design of the Marcus Center grove – concrete, gravel, and trees. This is definitively an example of simple materials used in elegant ways and accessible to the public.

Landscape architect Joe Karr, who worked with Kiley from 1963-1969 and who worked on this project, said it is one of the best projects from the office at that time. As quoted just two weeks ago in *Landscape Architecture* magazine, when discussing the proposed demolition, Karr said: "The trees form a mass that's almost a structure. Dan quite often used plants like an architect would use other materials." In that same article, Charles Birnbaum, president of The Cultural Landscape Foundation, stated: "It's truer to the Tuileries [garden in Paris] as any Kiley landscape that survives today."

Dan Kiley represents the realization that Modernism could be understood and represented through Classical lines that provided true clarity of space.

This grove of trees, within the overall landscape surrounding the Marcus Center, draws together the complexities of the site and the conflicting demands of the context in a clearly stated way. There is little that is arbitrary, and it is a direct answer to a specific condition. The design, with its strict order, is responsive to the sharp angles of the building and the grid of the city streets. And it speaks to the multiple scales at play between the building and the street.

The trees specifically were chosen so that their height would offset the various facades. Sinking slightly below grade, the sunken grove is a slight but crucial level change that allows the space to still be porous to the city streets and sidewalks that surround it, yet distinct from it. It is enclosure without walls. The classic composition is immediately apparent, but the ambient plane of crushed gravel ensures that all the life we have been talking about, all of the programmed and unprogrammed movements of people, could happen freely within the space.

Kiley's work on Milwaukee's performing arts center is significant for many reasons. It is a masterful demonstration of the skill and vision that brought him international acclaim as a pioneer of Modernism in designed landscapes. It's a fine example of a six-decade career that culminated in being honored as a recipient of the National Medal of Arts (1997), a rare achievement for a landscape architect.

Dan Kiley's final public commission to be realized during his lifetime is the Cudahy Gardens at the Milwaukee Art Museum. It was designed in 1998 to complement the Quadracci Pavilion designed by Santiago Calatrava; the two closely collaborated. To have, within blocks of each other, two public projects that bookend the civic career of one of the most important postwar landscape architects is of great cultural significance for Milwaukee—a distinction that once forfeited can never be regained. Dan Kiley continued to practice until his death in 2004."